

A Terrace in Rome



Pascal Quignard

TRANSLATED BY DOUGLAS PENICK AND CHARLES RÉ

Pascal Quignard (b. 1948) is the French author of over sixty books of fiction, essays, and his own particular genre of fragmented philosophical reflection that weaves together personal journal, historical narrative, and poetic theory. His books in English include *Albucius*, *All the World's Mornings*, *The Sexual Night*, *Sex and Terror*, *On Wooden Tablets: Apronenia Avitia*, and *The Salon in Wurttemberg*, as well as the multiple volumes of his ongoing book project *The Last Kingdom*, which to date includes *The Roving Shadows*, *The Silent Crossing*, and *Abysses*.

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Pascal Quignard is one the most renowned and prolific of contemporary French authors, but in the English-speaking world he is known mainly for *All the World's Mornings* (*Tous les matins du monde*)—a novel about the great seventeenth-century viola da gamba player Marin Marais and his teacher Sainte-Colombe, which was made into a highly successful film starring Gerard Depardieu in 1991.

In France, however, his works are widely read and have been awarded a number of prestigious awards. He has won the Carus Prix des Critiques and the Goncourt Prize, France's highest honor.

A Terrace in Rome was published in 2000 and received the Prize of the Académie Française that same year. It has since been published in nineteen languages. This is its first translation into English.

Quignard is admired for the subtlety of his extensive scholarship and broad culture that embrace literature, history, music,

philosophy, and painting from Graeco-Roman times until our own. These provide the anchor for his meditations on the great topics of Western thought. His inwardness ranges over the abstractions of love, sex, loss, death, time, and art. In his more recent work, including the Goncourt Prize-winning *Wandering Shadows* (*Ombres Errantes*), he has evolved an unusual form of fiction made from fragments and reflections.

In *A Terrace in Rome*, Quignard has achieved a perfect balance between action and reflection, formal beauty and forward motion. In brief episodes, this complex book evokes the harsh passions, violent fate, and luminous inner life of a fictional seventeenth-century engraver. When a jealous lover throws acid on Geoffroy Meaume's face, he is monstrously disfigured. Despite the brilliance of his work, his life is ever after confined to the shadows as he moves back and forth across Europe. A shadow himself, he nonetheless fascinates many famous people of the age. In Rome, he becomes a friend of Claude Lorrain, while he makes his living by making strange and haunting engravings. His erotic prints create a scandal, and he again becomes a wanderer, dying finally in Gerard Van Honthorst's vacant Antwerp studio.

As Rondeau Daniel said of this novel in his review in *L'Express*: "This meditation on the suffering of love, on the violence of desire for the absolute . . . is given to us in brief chapters, in a style that is concise, stripped of rhetorical seductions, focused on the essential."

A Terrace in Rome is a story constructed from lapidary fragments. It gives us a portrait, now direct, now oblique, now close up, now from afar, of the life of a passionately visionary man in a world of unforeseeable brutality and change. His story remains

in our minds like a secret legend, haunting us long after we have read the last page. It is a masterpiece.

Douglas Penick
Boulder, Colorado
12 July 2015

CHAPTER I

Meaume said to them: "I was born in 1617 in Paris. I was apprenticed to the Follin atelier in Paris. Then to the atelier of Rhuys the Protestant in the city of Toulouse. Then to the Heemkers' atelier in Bruges. After Bruges, I lived alone. In Bruges, I loved a woman and my face was completely burned. For two years I hid this hideous face up in the cliffs above Ravello in Italy. Men without hope are cornered. All men in love are cornered. All who read books are cornered. Men without hope live hanging in space like figures painted in a mural, not breathing, not speaking, listening to no one. The cliff that dominates the gulf of Salerno was a wall facing the sea. I have never again found joy with any woman other than her. It is not joy that I miss. It is her. And so have I, all my life, etched the same body moving in the intensity of passion of

which I never stopped dreaming. The playing-card makers under whose protection I worked in Toulouse called the decks whose face cards represented heroes of novels 'Romantic cards.' 'Antique cards' were those decks whose face cards represented prophets from the Bible or generals from Roman history. 'Erotic cards' were those that showed the acts that make us. Now I live in Rome where I engrave those religious scenes and those shocking cards. They are for sale at the print seller's shop at the sign of the Black Cross on the Via Giulia."

CHAPTER II

In 1639, Jacob Veet Jakobsz, a goldsmith in the city of Bruges, was the elected judge for that year. He had a daughter who was strange and beautiful. She was blond, very pale, willowy, slightly bent over, slim-waisted, slim hands, heavy breasts, very quiet. The young engraver Meaume saw her at the procession of the goldsmiths' guild festival. He was twenty-one years old. He had completed his apprenticeship with Rhuys the Protestant in Toulouse. Meaume arrived from Lunéville in the company of Errard the Nephew who then left him to go to Mainz.

Her beauty left him desolate.

Her slimness drew him to her.

And so did he follow her without even being aware of it.

She, she was aware of it. Meaume caught her gazing at him. That gaze lived in him all his life. Right away, he asked the master where he worked to be kind enough to mention him to her. His master, the celebrated Jan Heemkers, agreed to help without the slightest hesitation. They went to her to pay their respects. She raised her eyes. With head bowed, she responded to their greeting. But not a word between them. Only their names were exchanged. From that moment on, he looked for her everywhere in the free city. He was at every Mass she attended. He made his way into municipal ceremonies on a variety of pretexts. He went to all the markets. He joined in all the public dances and celebrations organized by the City of Bruges.

She, she looked for his silhouette. She would see him hiding behind the parapets of the bridges over the canals. Behind the stone basins of the fountains in the squares. She would see his shadow merge into the black shadows of the porticoes and into the narrower and more yellow shadows that fall behind church columns. Each time, glimpsing his presence filled her with happiness. She lowered her eyelids immediately when she met his eyes. She sometimes acted strangely and in broad daylight she would hide herself in dark corners, curled over, very pale.

He won over her servant. Or rather, it was the servant who came to him. This point is important, but is

one that gets overlooked. What matters is that finally they met face to face.

It happened in a tiny side chapel. In an icy corner. In the great hospital of Bruges. It is very cold. They are engulfed in the dusky shadow of a supporting wall. The servant is the lookout. The apprentice engraver finds no words to say to the only daughter of the elected judge. And so, he shyly touches her arm with his fingers. She slides her hand into his hands. She gives her hand, cool and alive, into his hands. That is all. He squeezes her hand. Their hands become warm, then burning. They do not speak. She keeps her head bowed. Then she looks at him, directly into his eyes. Her eyes widen, staring openly at his face. They touch each other in that stare. She smiles at him. They separate.

The young woman never speaks. It is the spring of 1639. She is eighteen years old. Her posture is so timid that she seems slightly hunchbacked. She has a long neck. She is always dressed in severe gray clothes. Meaume knows that she is promised to an assistant who works for her father, and who is also the son of a friend of Jan Heemkers. Henceforth, she refuses to speak to the young man. She doesn't even want to dine in the presence of this man she must marry. She loves to eat, but alone in her bed behind the bed-curtains, while her servant stays behind the door so that no one can surprise her in the act of putting food in her mouth. She waits for Meaume constantly, night and day. She dreams of eating with

Meaume in her bed. Alone with Meaume in the shadow
of the curtain closed around her bed.

CHAPTER III

Meaume says: "For the second meeting, I followed down a corridor a little candle fixed in a copper candleholder."

Meaume again: "Each man follows the fragment of night in which he breaks apart.

"A grape swells and tears.

"At the beginning of summer, all the yellow plums split open.

"What man is not in love, when childhood bursts?"

She answers: "I don't know."

Meaume, the apprentice to Jan Heemkers, follows the flame, follows the candleholder and the rosy fingers, follows the servant, follows the light on her shoulders, follows the leather-covered walls of the corridor. The first time he undresses the daughter of the elected judge of the City of Bruges, it takes place in the house

of Veet Jakobsz. It is a simple burgher's house on a canal. They put the candle as far from themselves as they can. In the candlelight, they are both awkward and then both daring; their nakedness completely revealed, their joy swift, their hunger almost instantly reborn. In the hour that follows his departure, the young woman's craving is greater and greater. In the following days, when she meets with the engraver, she dares to move in the ways her soul shows her in sleep. When she doesn't see him, when she is alone, she turns pale with desire. She says that her breasts ache. She tells him that the flower of her sex, from now on always open, from now on always fragrant, is always wet. Though they see each other often, they can't always be united. Strangely, when she was at the height of her pleasure, when her body clearly expressed it, never did her face show happiness. That astonished Meaume the Engraver. One day she said: "I'm ashamed to tell you this, but my belly is like a live ember." He replied, "Do not be embarrassed about speaking to me in this manner. For me, my own sex rises every time I think of how you look at me, even when I'm in the street, even when I'm working at the atelier." Little by little, she visits him at any time. Without care for how long. Even for only a minute. Her craving, her intrusiveness troubles her, but she cannot control her desire to be in his presence. As for Meaume, these encounters create embarrassment, for there is work to be done for Heemkers, and because the slightest break in the process of making

the engravings alters the acid baths, but he doesn't care,
he rushes wherever the little servant leads him.

In the garden (July 1639).

In the bedroom twice.

In the cellar, lit by an iron lantern.

In the old tile factory.

In the garret six times.

At the inn-keeper's.

One time, in a small boat she had rented for the day.

CHAPTER IV

At the innkeeper's. All of a sudden, the window flies open with a huge thundering crash. The lovers, twisting and astride each other, are suddenly covered with shards of falling glass. Jacobsz's assistant, Vanlacre, cut himself when he shattered the window. He staggers. His lip bleeds. He takes the stopper from the small clay flask he holds in his hand. He is about to throw the contents of the bottle of acid on Meaume, who has pulled away from the naked and so very white body of Jacobsz's daughter. Meaume tries to stand, his sex still slick and blue, he wants to fight Vanlacre, takes a step forward, sideward, back. This moment is as laughable as it is futile. The fiancé of Jakobsz's daughter has thrown the acid. Meaume's chin, lips, forehead, hair, neck are burned. Even the elected judge's daughter is hit on her hand. She screams.

Everyone is screaming, so intense is the pain each feels. Meaume is carried to his master. Heemkers calls in a doctor to take care of his apprentice. His eyes have not been injured. Already his face is completely blistered.

Later on, pus oozes from his wounds. His suffering is extreme.

After his fever has fallen, Meaume is determined to reunite with the daughter of the elected judge. He goes to find her servant.

The servant tells him that her mistress doesn't wish to see him again. In addition, she makes it clear to Meaume that her mistress didn't try to find out anything about him in all the days he was suffering.

"And so?" asks Meaume.

"And so, that's her wish," the servant answers, ill at ease.

Meaume writes to Jacob Veet Jakobsz's daughter.

Heemkers the Elder, a close friend of the magistrate Jacob Veet Jakobsz, confides to Meaume that the latter can exercise his power almost at will in the free city of Bruges. And now, he is pressing Heemkers to warn Meaume to leave his daughter in peace.

The young Vanlacre is punished with a fine. Heemkers presses his apprentice in the art of acid etching to accept the fine the judge has set. Meaume pockets the money. The young engraver, still tortured by the daughter of the elected Judge's rejection and by her silence, seems almost calm. He has returned to his work in

Heemkers' atelier. He varnishes his copper plates with a soft pad. Twice rather than once, he sharpens his engraving tools on the whetstone.

Just at that moment, the young girl has a letter delivered to him.

CHAPTER V

The letter from Jakob Veet Jacobsz's daughter addressed to Meaume: "I received with pleasure your letter which requests news in regard to my hand. It bears witness to your affection, and I thank you for it. My hand is wounded but not dead. All the fingers with which God graced me still move. They can even wiggle without any difficulty. It is they that help me write you without a cramp taking hold or hobbling them. You have also sent a beautiful gift that pleased me. This portrait that you made of my face and breast shows me to advantage, so skillful is your art. The frame of red seashells is pretty. I've taken scissors to cut out the breasts, for your engraving showed me naked, and that did not seem decent to me. When after lunch my gaze fell on your letter and onto this little portrait of me you were kind enough to etch in dry point,

tears came to my eyes, for I am saying goodbye. The day before yesterday, I looked at you in church. Yesterday, I saw you walking down the lane and entering your master's shop. You have become hideous. Moreover, when I reconsidered and reviewed your row with Ennemond, I thought you fought very badly. It's not possible to fight much worse. Above all, I felt remorse for having given myself to you so shamelessly. When I look back, I truly regret it. And so I went to my father an hour ago to ask him to hasten my marriage to the one who burned my hand when he threw that flask, and my father felt that after the unfortunate gossip this brawl had caused in our city, the publication of the marriage bans would be welcome since the engagement was already known. My door is forever closed to you. We shall not see each other again. Nanni"

CHAPTER VI

A few days later, one morning in August 1639, a most beautiful day, Nanni wakes him up. Meaume doesn't believe his eyes. She is there, in his garret. The girl he loves has returned. She is leaning over him. She is tapping his shoulder. He is naked. She does not lust after his nakedness. On the contrary, she throws a shirt on his belly. She whispers in a low voice, an urgent voice: "Listen to me. Listen to me."

She turns around as if someone were following her. Her face is that of a frightened woman. Her eyes sparkle with anguish. Her face is flushed, gentle, drawn, emaciated, serious. She has dark circles under her eyes. Her long hair is tied back simply under her gray cap. She is wearing a gray dress with a white ruff. She is more beautiful than ever. She bends toward him.

"You have to leave. You mustn't wait."

The sleeper sits up in his bed. He rubs his eyes. He straightens his hair as best he can.

"You must leave the city this very moment."

"Why?"

"Immediately."

"Why immediately?"

"He's on his way. He wants to kill you."

With a look of horror, she touches his face and tells him: "I loved the face you had. I am sad you have lost it."

"What have you done? Why must I leave right now?" asks Meaume, violently pulling his head and hair from Nanni Veet Jackobsz's hands.

She says nothing. Slowly she moves her hand toward the shirt she had placed to hide the painter's nakedness. She squeezes softly through the fabric then grasps his sex as it hardens beneath the shirt. Then abruptly she lets go of the sex she made hard. She looks at him. She gives him a lovely smile. But as she stops smiling, she says: "Because I told him I loved you."

Suddenly, she bursts into tears. She blows her nose.

"You have become a truly hideous man," she tells him.

"What can I do about it?"

"Frankly, you don't see yourself!"

She puts her handkerchief back in her sleeve. She says: "I wanted him to kill you. Now I don't want him to kill you."

She has barely spoken when he tears himself away from her. He gets up, dresses, runs down two flights of stairs, enters the private apartment of his master, confers with him and his wife. He leaves without delay.

Meaume says: "I was leaving to take my poor song elsewhere. Just as there is a music of damnation, there is a painting of damnation."

The acid for etching is stranger than a color.

Since his face was burned, those who once knew him could no longer recognize him.

He turned disaster into opportunity. He began stealing in Bruges, and changed the way he looked. He went to Antwerp without anyone knowing who he might be and there went on stealing. He stole, but he loved her. When he discovered that he loved only her, inexplicably, he ceased stealing and ceased seeking pleasure in the company of women of the night who were not disgusted by his face, or were, more simply, diverted by money. He went to Mainz. In Mainz, Meaume the Engraver again met Errard the Nephew, with whom he shared a heated room. The room was big enough for his copper plates, his varnishes, his chest, his easel, his pigeon-feather brushes, his acid baths. A year later in 1640, he saw her. It is early afternoon. She is alone, in a blue and yellow dress, in front of the splendid golden bell at the Goldsmith's Lane in Mainz, waiting for him.

Once again, he can't keep his eyes off the young woman.

He stops. She attracts him more than ever. She is coming toward him, her head slightly bowed. In answer to one of his questions, she confirms she has been married for ten months. To another question, she answers: yes she has a baby. By whom? She does not answer. She raises her eyes. She laughs. She takes his hand.

“Come,” she says to him.

“No,” he says.

He looks at her. Then he shakes his head, no. He runs.

CHAPTER VII

He runs, he ran. Left Mainz. He stayed three weeks on his own without putting his nose outside the door of an inn on the other bank of the Rhine where he had taken lodgings in a sort of stable with six other men. Three weeks of dry sobs, his body lying in the hay and its heavy smell. Then he left that world, crossed Wurtemberg, the Swiss cantons, the Alps, the Vatican States, Rome, Naples. He went to hide his face for two years, staying in Ravello above the little village, in a cliff on the Gulf of Salerno. Finally it was Rome in 1643, the Aventine Hill, the terrace with the covered porch, the nocturnal engravings, the scandalous collection of 1650, the erotic cards on which he dreamed of love. The engravings were marked with the sign of the shop, the Black Maltese Cross on the Via Giulia. The print dealer kept this shop

near the Palazzo Farnese. To reach it, the engraver had only to walk a hundred meters along the Tiber, pass by the synagogue, cross the Jewish ghetto. He signed his work in the lower left corner, *Meaumus sculpsit*. Long ago his father had been a candlemaker. Rare are the sons of candlemakers who become engravers. The fathers of Lasne, of Callot, of Poilly were goldsmiths. The apprenticeship had begun very early for the child who displayed incredible gifts for sketching the body's natural postures and expressions, for drawing out of the darkness hands and faces, for depicting scenes that were vile or humble or shameful and which no one had ever seen before.

CHAPTER VIII

At the age of forty, Meaume said that he had experienced eight ecstasies. To one of his Roman companions who was asking what they were, he said: "A dream; a memory; a canvas which showed Saint Paula in the port of Ostia from the hand of Claude Gellée, who gave it to him in the year 1651; a young girl before the boats in the port of Bruges." Then, as he had ceased to speak, he reflected in his silence. That made only four.

A few days later, on Palm Sunday, still in Meaume's atelier on the Aventine, the companion again took up the subject with the engraver, asking why he had fallen silent when recalling his visions. "Because when I'm in the presence of certain images, I suffer," he answered.

They heard, rising from the early coolness of the lane, the chant *Pueri Hebraeorum vestimenta prosternebant in*

via. The children had left the nave of the Bocca della Verità and were making their way to Santa Sabina. The procession then would end with the vespers in front of the apostle's tomb at Saint Paul's Outside the Walls, where they would put down the last palm fronds.

After a long time, the procession left the lane and reached the bank of the Tiber. The chanting went with them.

Suddenly the chant had disappeared.

The engraver and his companion were working in silence.

During the evening of the same day, the engraver drew back the black velvet curtain covering the canvas given him by Le Lorrain.

It was the first marvel that he showed his companion.

Next, he took a glass flask from his chest. There was a human ear inside the bottle. It had become very pale. It was as translucent as a frog's webbed palm.

Thirdly, Meaume went back to the chest and took out a tapestry, which he unrolled on the stone floor. The tapestry had been made by the Flemish weavers of the Gobelins factory and stolen during the religious upheavals from a convoy of Walloons who had been commissioned to deliver it to the Louvre. The left side depicted Ulysses swimming in a tempestuous sea while his ship was sinking behind him. The tapestry's central section showed Ulysses naked on the shores of the Phaeacians,

his body dripping with water, hiding his sex from Nausicaa's gaze as she holds a blue ball in her hand.

"The fourth marvel," he said, "is a drawing." He put aside two drawings of John the Baptist beheaded which he kept in his portfolio, and he put back on the shelf a copy of Bosio's *Roma Sotterranea*, a book full of night scenes. Then he showed a drypoint etching of particular clarity: A young girl with a long face, wearing a cap in the style of Bruges, a white ruff, is seated on a bed whose sheets are unmade, in front of an open window. One sees masts and, farther off on the right, a pale lighthouse still enveloped in a halo of mist in the white dawn.

The young girl gazes in front of her; she is frightened.

For the fifth, a mezzotint. This latest marvel depicted a ruined town in the mountains; above it, just below the clouds, a steep footpath and a donkey at the edge of an abyss. Inscribed in a caption on the left: *Sedens super asinam Lucius. Meaum. Sculps. August. 1656*. Then the Maltese Cross.

"The dream that is the sixth," Meaume whispered then, "was Nanni of Bruges in the shadows . . ."

But he fell silent because he had no more voice in his throat.

That made only six.

Meaume the Engraver offered his companion the mezzotint that depicted the path through the Pyrénées above the abyss. He said: "I have felt in myself an

inexplicable elation on seeing the ancient forum turned back into pastures. I looked at the little path shaded by elms, all the animals grazing in the vines and thickets, the stone cutters in front of their brazier, people hunting for silver and gold coins with their spades on their shoulders. I did not think of Rome like this." It was in the company of Monsieur Gellée that Monsieur Meaume learned to engrave landscapes when he arrived in Rome in 1643. Monsieur Gellée said of Monsieur Meaume that his genius had no feeling for color. The intensity of his vision took over his hand and was concerned with nothing else. Never in his thirty-five working years did he pay attention to his hand. What he saw in the depths of his skull, behind his eyes, had to erupt. His vision severed itself from shade, broke out from the background, broke away from a night that knew no light.

Had Meaume been Nature, he would have made only lightning, or the moon, or the foaming waves of the ocean in a tempest, crashing on the black rocks of the shore. Or nakedness revealed by chance under silk. Or an animal bone or a chunk of flint one finds in the earth. Regarding landscapes or views of mountains, Meaume the Engraver himself would say: "I think that natural places are animals like us. The torrent that rushes through valleys, or the bank that it cuts, is the same as the bird that glides, waiting in the air, or the donkey that climbs and hesitates. The vaults of shadowed caverns are filled with figures traced by the constellations. The

she-bears of the Pyrénées rising on their hind legs are huge sailing ships listing in typhoons.”

Grünehagen’s version is not quite the same: “One day as he was engraving images of paradise on his terrace in Rome, his companion, named Poilly who came from Abbeville, considered his stillness and the extraordinary concentration of his face, and said jokingly: ‘Do you believe that in Paradise you will know comparable ecstasies?’ But Monsieur Meaume remained serious and maintained that even in paradise it would be so. ‘Has God even imagined them?’ asked Poilly. Monsieur Meaume replied with the same gravity: ‘It is matter that imagines heaven. Then it is heaven that imagines life. Then it is life that imagines nature. Then nature grows and shows itself in different forms which it does not conceive so much as it invents while stirring up fire in space. Our bodies are one of those images that nature has attempted to draw from light.’” Grünehagen adds: “Monsieur Gellée said in jest of Monsieur Meaume: ‘Engravers are grave.’ That is what Italians call German humor.”

CHAPTER IX

The dream of Meaume is this: He is sleeping in his garret in Bruges (in the lodging Jan Heemkers had given him above his own apartment, on the fourth floor of his house on the canal). His sex suddenly grows erect over his belly. The light of the sun, white, thick, hot, streams down on the naked breast of a young woman, blonde with a long neck. The light spills over the contours of her body, eroding the shadows of her cheeks and breasts. It is Nanni Veet Jakobsz. She leans over him. She lowers herself onto him. She plunges his sex into her in a single stroke. He ejaculates.

CHAPTER X

Four statements made by Meaume the Engraver and reported by Grünehagen.

About Nanni Veet Jakobsz: "Love consists of images which obsess the spirit. Add to these irresistible visions an inexhaustible conversation addressed to the one to whom all one's living is devoted. That one can be alive or dead. That being's description is given in dreams for in dreams neither will nor self-interest rules. Now, dreams, they are images. In an even more precise way, dreams are both fathers and masters of those images. I am a man whom images attack. I create images that emerge from the night. I was dedicated to an early love whose flesh did not vanish in reality, but this vision of love has no longer been possible because the enjoyment has been

granted to a more handsome specimen. There is no need to speak of this further."

About his art: "The coat of varnish protecting the copper plate from the acid must have the consistency of honey in winter. One should not complain about its application being tiring for the hand, since indeed the process is always difficult, up to this point. The cuts in the copper plate follow the shadows. The shadows follow the strength of the light. All flows into a single and unique course."

About landscapes: "To tell the truth, without lying and because I don't want to lie, nothing that is made by hand pleases me compared to the astonishing landscapes made by God. Even a canvas painted in Rome by Claude Le Lorrain. Even an engraving by Morin. Even the port of Bruges. Even the castle of Tiberius on the Gulf of Salerno. Compared to the Ca' d'Oro or the treasure of the Emperor Alexander, I prefer the Atlantic Ocean. The Coliseum at the foot of the Oppian Hill is less beautiful than a tempest."

As soon as there was a storm, the engraver would leave his house and go climbing in the mountains.

One day, Claude, called Le Lorrain, said to Meaume the Engraver: "How can you know what is beneath the appearance of all things? As for me, I cannot do that. In all my life, I have never been able to imagine the bodies of the women I desired through the fabrics that separated me from them. I saw only the colors and their

shimmering. Each time, I have been surprised by my errors."

Meaume answered: "You are a painter. You are not an engraver, dedicated to black and white; that is to say, to lust. Once, in a free port in Flanders, I was overwhelmed."

Claude Gellée, called Le Lorrain, said: "If there are no appearances of this world, one cannot paint its images. One can only paint the light that burns its forms."

"What light are you speaking of?"

"I speak of the light that illuminates the world."

"And so you think the sun burns the earth that it lights?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you are right."

"I think that the light of the sun is the one most beautiful thing since it allows us to discover all things. That is why I will live from now on in Rome, rather than in Saint Dié or in Lunéville."

"But why paint if everything is being consumed?"

"Each one brings a little log to the pyre that lights the world."

"I cannot help thinking that with my acid, I too add a little bit to all that is burning."

The engraver fell silent for a moment.

Then shifting his gaze to look at his terrace, he said: "However, I don't think you are right. There is a way of appearing that is specific to this world. Often there are

dreams. At times one must pull back the bedclothes to show the bodies making love. Sometimes, one must show the bridges and hamlets, the towers and the belvederes, the boats and carts, people in their dwellings with their domestic animals. Sometimes the mist is enough or the mountain. Sometimes a tree bending under gusts of wind is enough. Sometimes even the night is enough, rather than the dream which makes real for the soul that which it lacks or that which it has lost."

CHAPTER XI

The series of mezzotint engravings of the Pyrénées shows first of all a town in ruins in the mountains. In the lower left: *Sedens super asinam Lucius. Meaum. Sculps. August. 1656*. Above the town a large cemetery lies on the mountainside. The cemetery is larger than the village itself and closer to us, the viewers.

Vast golden cemetery. It's an immense garden, completely abandoned. As abandoned as nature might have been at the time of the first man born there. The stones have moved. Slabs that snows, centuries, and winds have split. Moss has overtaken them. Ivy has engulfed the gravestones.

Ivy, clinging to everything upright, has bound itself to the crosses and embraced them, then hidden them, then shackled them, then broken them.

In the second engraving, Meaume the Engraver has drawn himself, hiding his disfigured face beneath a large straw hat. He crosses under the somber gateway of the little mountain church. The gate is a few meters from the church.

This series of mezzotints, dating from 1656, commemorates the long journey that Meaume the Engraver made with Abraham Van Berchem, fleeing the French during the summer of 1651.

In this print, the engraver moves forward amid the tombs. He moves forward amid the men and women of former times who sleep.

Next, two shadows arrive in the darkened nave. Innumerable small shards of glass are scattered on the floor. Underfoot, the fragments of yellow stained glass fallen to the ground crackle; large unbroken pieces shatter under boot soles. It recalls a casement window in an innkeeper's room on a little canal. There is no God.

There was no God in that little drawing of the dark church. There was only the ruin of the place in the light. Only the wind could pass for the divinity that was worshipped in that empty sanctuary on the mountainside.

The wind whistled sometimes.

The tapestries, falling in tatters on the walls, shook roughly, jerking as if inside the nave they were alive.

The cross without its victim, still attached to the altar, drops its powder of decaying wood into the hands of John and onto the face of Mary.

Near the vaulted sacristy, the bell has fallen. The bell is also of another time. This is the fourth engraving. The great bronze bell has sunk partly into the pavement of red stone. Only a trail of dust remains from the rope at its side.

That is pure sorrow, that sound which was only dust on the crimson marble. A blast of wind that would have stripped the ground of this holy site could not have made the bronze bell ring; it would have dispersed and effaced all vestige of the rope. It would not have been able to testify to the abandonment it provoked then, nor to the bell's lost lament.

In the fifth mezzotint engraving, the two continue on. They go back down into the valley. The heat is stifling; the leaves on the trees motionless, the silence oppressive. The air does not move. It is almost like honey or thick milk, a clammy silence. It's an opaque whitish mass without any trace.

No more men in the landscape. Abraham and Meaume take advantage of the chance to travel openly.

Throughout the day, they followed a road empty but filled with mirages undulating like waves before them.

No wasps. Nor any fly moving in the air that weighs on the soil.

The yellowed grass had become hard and sharp under foot.

In the Pyrénées, evening has already spread into the valley, but not into the sky which is still blue as day above

the mountain crests. The hamlet, the road, the bridge, all the farms and stables are, in this mezzotint, almost all absorbed in the darkness. For the shadow of the mountain projects a true darkness which seems almost crimson from the intensity of its blackness. Except a stretch of road that climbs up the facing peak. A pink stretch of road which escapes from the color black.

One sees it pink.

Abraham and Meaume got lost.

They had wandered at the bottom of the valley into thicker woods. There was no more light. There was no more path. For a long time there had been no more path in the world. Abraham walked ahead. He walked slowly in silence. They came to the edge of the forest and glimpsed a sort of fenced enclosure. Abraham moved forward. He stopped next to a young nun who was herding goats.

"Sister, could you tell me where we are?"

"You are lost?"

"Yes."

"We are in the kingdom of Spain," she whispered. "I am ashamed."

Then the young nun stroked the back of her left hand. She raised her eyes toward Abraham Van Berchem and smiled.

"I don't think so," the old man replied, and smiled in turn at the girl's cheerful face.

"May God hear you," exclaimed the young nun. "I can't tell you how joyful I would be. I would love so much not to be in this land of shit."

Her expression became somber. Then, sadly, she said: "I fear we are still on earth."

At that moment, Abraham took her hand.

The young nun let him take it.

She continued: "Are we on earth?"

He said: "Do you really wonder?"

She laughed. He suddenly let go of her hand, and they parted.

Meaume the Engraver looked back from twenty paces away. The young nun had crouched down in the impenetrable shadows of the forest, her buttocks resting on her calves, half hidden by tree trunks fallen on the mountainside at the edge of the forest. That is what he had engraved.

CHAPTER XII

Marie Aidelle was climbing up the path that rose from the seashore. She clutched at bushes, at roots, at shrubs, at broom, so wild and difficult to climb was the path up the cliff. Her jacket was soaked. Even her shirt beneath her breasts. Her face was streaming with sweat from the heat. Finally she pushed open the door of the house. Marie was about to rush into the darkness of the main room when she let out a small cry; an unknown man was standing near the fireplace, his face disfigured. He was hideous.

He said: "I am very ugly, I know."

"No, no," Marie said faintly.

"You know, it's so hot. I would be grateful for a little wine as a gesture of welcome."

"Of course."

"Who is it?" Esther called suddenly from the upper floor. The old woman, who once lived off shipwrecks, had escaped into the brush a long time ago.

"Who are you?" Marie echoed. She inspected that face of boiled leather, his eyes wide open, sparkling, attentive.

"My name is Meaume."

Marie did not answer. She went into a small adjoining room which smelled of mushrooms to find an engraving. She held it out to him.

Meaume murmured, "I think the tanner sold it to you."

"The peddler," she said.

"Well, if you prefer."

For the peddler had once been a tanner. Then Meaume drew near. He took the young woman's sweaty hands in his. He said: "Old Abraham will be here before the end of this month. We were delayed because we traveled through Spain."

She noticed the wooden chest in the middle of the room. She asked: "How were you able to carry that chest up the path?"

"I did not take the path. I came here through the forest. These are my copper plates and my engraving tools. They are all of my assets. My poor treasure."

But Marie kept looking at the chest intently. Meaume stepped forward, leaned over, and opened it. She saw new copper plates and others eroded with *vert-de-gris*.

He was indeed an engraver. An "eau-fortier," as they called it then.

"It will be difficult to accommodate you here," Marie said.

"There's always a stable," said Meaume.

"No."

"There's always a barn."

"No."

"There's always a cowshed."

"Yes."

"That will do."

"And for your work?"

"What's going on?" shouted the old harridan who had reappeared under the door's huge lintel.

"Nothing. Nothing."

CHAPTER XIII

Engraving of Marie Aidelle made with a burin.

Marie is sitting under the trees at the edge of the pond. She has taken off her wooden shoes.

She wiggles her toes in the water.

She has lifted her skirts above her knees.

He sees the reflection of her white thighs in the still water beneath her.

Suddenly he sees the light of the water reflected in her eyes. That is what is engraved. That is what is seen. That is what is seen so intensely that she has raised her eyes and they shine tenderly, deeply. He desires her. He goes to sit beside her.

CHAPTER XIV

Meaume the Engraver first made his drawings on blue paper. With a bit of chalk. He constantly went down to the sea. He spent his days in the roar of the water at the foot of the cliff. The path to Le Perreux, the nauseating slime, the shoals of green and glistening rocks, the huge white surf of waves charging, advancing with an irresistible force; he found these images magnificent. It made him dizzy. The air was so violent. He was like a man intoxicated long ago who could never leave that state. With Rome behind him, he was discovering the Atlantic. The first drawing, dated from 1651 at Le Perreux, was the island, the outline of the island on the horizon line. The second drawing was the great rolling surf of rising waves. The third drawing, fishermen carrying their nets across the wet and shiny sand. The next one was an oysterman

dragging his rake behind him. Marie Aidelle was full of admiration. At dusk, Marie contemplated the flame of the lamp whose light reflected on the copper plate; she contemplated Meaume's hand as it moved forward, the loupe as it moved forward. She contemplated the steel point as it cut directly into the metal. Meaume's hand was sure. She felt good near him. Marie Aidelle was fond of drinking in the evening. Now she drank even more. She would fall asleep on her arm as she admired him in silence. He belonged to the school of artists who, in the most refined manner, depicted things which most people considered the most common: tramps, ploughmen, beach combers, people selling clams, cockles, crabs, striped bass, young women taking off their shoes, young women hardly dressed reading letters or dreaming of love, maids ironing sheets, all the ripe fruits which, as they begin to mold, announce the coming autumn, the leftovers of a meal, drunkards carrying on, clouds of tobacco smoke, card players, a cat lapping from a tin bowl, the blind man and his companion, lovers embracing in various postures, unaware they are seen, mothers suckling their babies, philosophers meditating, men who had been hung, candles, the shadows of things, people urinating, others defecating, the old, the profiles of the dead, cattle ruminating or sleeping. Marie rediscovered the curiosity that had fired her early childhood when she was close to her father, now dead, and also when she was close to the priest at Hambye. And also when she was

close to Toussaint, the master surgeon. She asked thousands of questions. She asked in the main room: "Why haven't you tried painting? Why hasn't Jacques Callot ever used colors? Why those strokes, typical in Meaume's art, like strange letters of the alphabet, to create shadow?" One day on the cliff he put his hand on her shoulder. Immediately she pushed his hand away. Meaume neared the abyss; he looked down on the surf at the base of the cliff. To Meaume the Engraver, Marie then said: "You must pardon me. One cannot touch my breasts even slightly without my suddenly feeling the pain of being a woman. All the women here feel like this."

"Even the old harridan?"

"Even the old harridan."

She lowered her voice almost at once: "Doubtless you don't know, but the women who live in this world have unhappy memories."

She fell silent.

"But speak to me," she said, "Speak. Say something."

She was weeping.

He took her hand. She pulled her hand away at once.

CHAPTER XV

At Le Perreux, Meaume looked at the fruit Marie was piling into a bowl. He held the candle close to a large bunch of purple grapes. As for himself, Meaume kept his face hidden in the darkness as completely as possible. He was thirty-five years old. His face was tanned, his scars less so. He moved the candle close and touched the purple grapes. He touched the light reflected on the grapeskin with the tip of his finger. He turned to Marie. He took her in his arms, and all at once she let him embrace her. She put her forehead on his shoulder. Meaume said that she had the skin of a little bat. As fine. As soft. As alive, sleek and warm. Then she spoke to him about the master surgeon in Lower Normandy, of his skin, as pockmarked as Meaume's own face. Her eyes widened as she spoke. But Meaume the Engraver did not want to hear what

she was saying nor hear the comparisons she was making with another man. He left on horseback. Once in a while, Oesterer would lend him his horse. The next day, at the beginning of the day, Meaume went to meet Marie who had gone down to the village of Le Perreux. But she was already climbing back up the path. Meaume got off his horse, put the bridle in the young woman's hand, took her basket, and walked up the path beside her.

It was a mild day. It was the end of summer. The bushes were full of blackberries. Thistles raised in the air their blue downy heads. The brook was half dry, barely flowing to the sea. It lingered in the curls of its minuscule channels. Butterflies resting everywhere, hardly flying anymore, growing old.

CHAPTER XVI

They opened the double doors of the great gallery; Monsieur de Sainte Colombe entered first. Abraham Van Berchem came next. Then, after a pause, Marie Aidelle, Meaume the Engraver, and Oesterer followed them. There were two long rows of small aquariums and terrariums set directly on the marble floor. There were about a hundred of them. Meaume the Engraver said: "It's Noah and his ark."

But Monsieur de Sainte Colombe did not respond to the remark, which Meaume had made to draw his attention. The two old men were contemplating salamanders, newts, lizards, tortoises, snails, crabs devouring each other in aquariums with gilded frames softly lit by torches. "This suite of rooms," said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe to Abraham, "is the gallery of ancestors."

"Yes," said Abraham Van Berchem.

"The ancestors are here, still eating."

"Yes."

"The old ones are insatiable," said Monsieur de Sainte Colombe.

Marie Aidelle hated that place, and, taking her skirts in her hands, left quickly.

CHAPTER XVII

Madame de Pont-Carré played the lute well. Accordingly, she had her lute brought to the parlor so that the Bishop of Langres could hear her play. Her playing was filled with sadness, with English austerity, with gravity, with pride. With her lute or theorbo, she accompanied Monsieur de Sainte Colombe in the private concerts he gave in his house by the river Bièvre. She also liked books. Her judgment was independent, her loyalties almost republican. She was the very first to give several thousand gold francs to begin construction of a new building at Port Royal des Champs, amid the wild fields on the edge of the forest near Versailles, where women could find shelter from men. There, she had the most beautiful apartment; it opened directly on the gallery of reception rooms, which included a large salon painted

in classical monochrome. She had a small private chapel, separate from the room where she put her desk. She built a broad terrace in front of her bedroom windows where she placed sixty planters with orange trees. Madame de Pont-Carré was generous. She gave refuge to Jansenists, to Republicans, to tyrannicides hunted by the royal archers, to Jews, to Puritans. She opened her arms to all who were persecuted.

Meaume the Engraver and Abraham Van Berchem went to the Paris residence of Madame de Pont-Carré on the Rue des Mauvaises Paroles.

They waited for the celebrated viol player who was going to meet them there, but he did not come.

CHAPTER XVIII

Such was the life of painters at that time: a succession of cities. They wandered. Meaume went from Paris to Lavour, next Toulouse, Lunéville, Bruges. In that order. The third journey, in haste and sorrow, was to Lake Como, the Duchy of Milan, the Republic of Venice, the Duchies of Parma and Bologna. In Bologna, he became a painter of stained glass windows. After Bologna, it was the terrible solitude of Ravello. Then Rome. Then Spain, Le Perreux, Quend, Paris, Antwerp. Then London and Utrecht. In Rome he made engravings for peddlers to sell. From the time of his arrival, he worked as an engraver for a print seller on the Via Giulia, near the Palazzo Farnese. He would copy prints, tracing them in pencil onto a sheet of paper, coating the reverse side of the paper with lampblack, and then retrace the image

onto a fresh copper plate for the final etching. It was said that he was a disciple of Villamena for allegorical figures, of the Caraccis for postures, of Claude Gellée for landscapes. He did not put in an appearance at the palaces of princes and cardinals. Outside his house on the Aventine Hill, he would wear a large straw hat under which he would hide his face. The long walls of Rome, with their shadows blue as sharks, guided his steps. And the shadows, depending on the hour, mapped his path. The gardens, the vineyards, the elm groves, the fields, the ruins. The masses of bougainvillea hanging over ancient walls. Tiled roofs jutting over alleys covered with soil and slippery moss. Later, when his eyesight weakened, about the time of his return from London, he liked working in full sunlight on the third-floor terrace beneath a porch roof of ochre tiles that he had enlarged. Sometimes, for the general public, he would still copy pictures of musical competitions or music lessons. At one time, the common people of ancient Rome revolted against the patricians and withdrew to the Aventine Hill until their rights were recognized. An old soldier in service to the consul Appius Claudius uncovered his backside, crying out: "*Provoco!*" This meant in the ancient tongue: "I appeal to the people of Rome." As for Meaume's taste, it was always for landscapes ever more empty, for ruins in ever deeper night, for seascapes with a tiny boat far off, as far away as possible, like the barque that carries off the dead. On the left lower corner, *Meaume Sculpsit*. In

winter, he would close the window. He worked in the empty room where he displayed his prints. A table, two chairs along the wall. A canopy covered the bed. Marie Aidelle slept for almost a year in that bed.

CHAPTER XIX

One day, Meaume said to her: "When Abraham crossed the Italian Alps during the thaw of 1651, traveling on foot in short stages, his mule fell. He lost everything. He continued on with nothing in his pockets, and the French soldiers arrested him as a vagrant. Then an old soldier stepped out of the ranks and pointed at him. He said: "This is the man who many years ago killed the Governor Commandant of the Fort of Pignerol. May you crush all my fingers, if what I say is not the very truth." After he had said these words, everyone fell on Abraham and beat him. Old Abraham would have died, if two majors had not stepped in. One, the new Commandant of the garrison at Pignerol, decided he should take Abraham to Toulouse, the town where the Count had been assassinated and the proper jurisdiction for a crime against a

noble of an ancient French line. He divided his regiment. The detachment assigned to take the prisoner to Toulouse first reached Thônes and then Talloires.

"At Talloires, in order to cross the lake and reach the city of Annecy, the soldiers requisitioned two barges which happened to be there. Since they did not want to make two trips, they overloaded the vessels, tightening the ropes to keep everything on board. The boatmen hoisted the sails. Old Abraham was watching these maneuvers, squeezed between two sacks and the side of the boat. The air was muggy. The cargo of sacks, trunks, weapons, barrels grew without cease and concealed him from the eyes of the soldiers. The old man said to himself that this or never was the moment to consider escaping. He suffered as he untied himself.

"The clouds were so black that they added their own darkness to the night that rose in the sky.

"He made his way into the longboat tied behind the barge. No one saw him. Without a knife, he could not cut the rope that tethered the longboat to the barge. He hesitated. Then he slid down into the icy water of the lake of Annecy. He wanted to swim, but the silence was too great. A line of clouds like animals was hurtling to the east. The soldiers and the boatmen watched them pass several yards above their heads. Had they raised their hands, they could have touched them. It is like that in the mountains.

"Finally the stars reappeared beneath the vault of night.

"The winds stopped suddenly.

"Abraham did not know if he could still be seen from the boats. He let himself float like a board beneath the moon. He moved only his feet, thighs, and arms, slowly, so that the extreme cold of the water would not overcome him. And so the night passed. The sky became pallid. He had the sense of being a piece of ice carried by currents wherever they wished. He kept his head turned toward the shore. He watched the bank in the dawn as mist began to rise and drift. He was breathing with difficulty."

Abraham had said to Meaume that suddenly he had smelled the intense and fresh and delicious aroma of the piñon pines in the morning. At that instant, he began to swim.

"He climbed the steep and silent bank. All was silent and blue. Piece by piece he took off his clothes and hung them in branches and spread them on rocks to dry in the sun. He stood naked in the silence and the dawn, looking at the mountain and shivering in a ray of sunlight.

"In the mountains, he found a shepherd's hut where the ground was dry. He stretched out and slept. Then he moved on to Vercelli. From there to Asti. From Genoa he set sail on a boat to Tuscany.

"The boat stopped at Port Santo Stefano, then Civit  Vecchia. Finally, at Ostia.

“Once in Rome, the old man climbed up the steep stairway to Meaume.”

Meaume said: “I left the table. I was rinsing my mouth. The servant was still holding the bowl for me to spit. Someone announced that an old gentleman covered with dust was waiting at the door of the third-floor apartment. ‘Would Monsieur the Engraver Meaumus deign to receive a man from Berchem?’ I jumped up. Abraham, still in the doorframe at the top of the stone steps, said: ‘Once you did not want to live any more, and I saved you. It is your turn.’ I answered immediately that he offended me.

“To give a reason lays waste to love.

“To justify what we love is to lie.

“For there is no other joy in human experience than the intense sensation of being alive.

“And there is no other way to live.

“I settled the old knight from Berchem on the terrace. I let him stretch out to rest under the yellow tiles of the porch roof where I usually worked in the spring. And there he fell asleep. As for me, I ran along the bank of the Tiber. I went to the print seller on the Via Giulia. I gathered together all the money that I could so that we could leave quickly.”

CHAPTER XX

A drypoint etching almost completely white. One can make out a form behind the balustrade bleached in the light. An old man, eyes closed, with a white beard, his hand between his legs, on a terrace in Rome, dusk, at nine in the evening, in the last golden radiance of the sun, in the happiness of being free, in the happiness of living between wine and dream.

CHAPTER XXI

"We left before dawn." As he was talking, Meaume handed his copper plates to Marie Aidelle, one by one taking them out of his wooden chest. One of them represented the old warrior on a litter being carried to the Portus Augusti.

Skies never seen with storms. Or so insanely white.

The muddy, filthy coast of the Mediterranean between the lagoons of Leucate and Perpignan.

Little arid paths on the slopes of Spain leading to the other sea.

A large black bear, disemboweled, found in a thicket still with his collar of two rows of little bells.

In the mountains of Catalonia, one had to avoid villages. Strangers were treated like wild animals. Throughout the summer of 1651, every Gypsy and Jew who could

be found in the French countryside was burned. The caravans were stripped to make firewood.

CHAPTER XXII

Meaume then showed Marie a copper plate that was very dark and represented the shadow of a huge cliff. "When we were nearing Le Perreux, old Abraham pulled me aside. When he was sure he was out of earshot of the boat captain, he told me 'I want to go alone up to Dunkirk where I have something to do. I'll come back.' We were looking up at the cliff so white and high that it faded into the whiteness of the sky. We were just beneath it. The cliff cast over us the vast night of its shadow. Above the silhouette of the crest, the moon, even before the sun had set, was shining. There are places in the world that date from the beginning of time. These spaces are instants where the Distant Past became frozen. Everything there flows together with ancient rage. This is the face of God. This is the mark of the primordial force

more immense than man, more vast than nature, more alive than life, as all embracing as the celestial system that preceded all three. And so, we entered the little port of Quend and its ruins."

The sun was setting, spreading slabs of gold on the chalk. The boat dropped anchor next to the bridge.

Leaving the shadow of the cliffs, we were dazzled by the glittering of the sun and the waves, the reflections of houses and boats as far as the eyes could see. Abraham Van Berchem put his hand on the engraver's shoulder. He said: "In getting old, it becomes more and more difficult to tear oneself away from the splendor of the landscape one passes through. The skin, worn out by wind and age, stretched by fatigue and many joys, the various kinds of body hair, tears, fluids, nails, and hair that have fallen to the ground like dead leaves and twigs, allow the soul to emerge and lose itself more and more beyond the limits of the skin. The final flight is, in truth, only a dispersion. The older I get, the more I feel at ease everywhere. I do not inhabit my body so much anymore. I feel my death coming someday soon. I feel my skin becoming much too thin and more porous. I say to myself: One day the landscape will pass through me."

"I have loved you!" the engraver cried out. Meaume held the old man close and kissed his cheeks.

He leaned on a wooden piling of the bridge and jumped into the water near the bank. The water came up to his knees.

He then climbed back on the mud of the shore. He didn't look back. He was overcome. So much that his lips were trembling. Finally, tears began running down his cheeks. "One day the landscape will pass through me." That is the sentence Abraham Van Berchem had said to Meaume the Engraver before leaving him and dying. Quend is a beautiful name.

A mezzotint is an engraving in reverse.

In a mezzotint the plate is first completely and evenly roughened. To bring out whiteness, one must press down and smooth areas of the rough surface. The landscape precedes the figure. It was in 1642 that Ludwig von Siegen invented mezzotint. In Brussels in 1653, Siegen revealed his secret to Ruprecht, Prince Palatine, who introduced it into England in 1656. There are only twenty-four mezzotints made by Meaume, all of which date after Abraham's death.

The rocker is the name for the tool that roughens the surface of the entire plate for the mezzotint.

By using mezzotint, every form on the page seems to emerge from the shadow like an infant emerging from its mother's sex.

CHAPTER XXIII

It is dark. Meaume the Engraver was naked. He drew near to Marie to make love. He said to her: "Please, do not lower your eyes."

Her nipples were hard. Her lips were thick and soft. Her sex was wet. She gave off a marvelous smell.

Marie gave off a marvelous smell of dense forest, of ferns, of mushrooms.

Her shoulder round and pale.

Soft like silk, her breasts are heavy with milk, saturated with a smell that would always entice. They fell silent.

Marie pulled a blanket back over her breasts and got up. Meaume followed her. She turned around and said to him: "If I had wanted you to follow me, I believe I would have told you to do so."

Meaume stopped short. Only his upper lip trembled with sadness again. Here in Berchem, Marie Aidelle was again refusing him entrance to her room. He said to himself: "It's my face." And he shut the door behind her. Then he shut behind him the door in the Renaissance enclosure. He went to Antwerp, which he had not visited since his disfiguration.

CHAPTER XXIV

When they returned from London, Marie Aidelle lived almost a year with Meaume in his atelier in Rome on the left bank of the Tiber in the year 1655. It was a year of happiness. One day when she had had a bad dream and she awakened, her face covered with sweat, he wanted to put her at ease. He said to her: "Whatever happens, know that I am at your side. Rely on me. Do not be afraid of anything. As far as I am concerned, since the first day we have lived together, you have been under the shelter of my roof." For Meaume, this was more than he had ever told any other woman since Nanni Veet Jakobsz. But Marie took it very badly. She retorted: "What is a roof to me? I did not suspect that we would be living together for such a trivial reason." She pulled her feet from under the sheet that was covering them and got out

of bed. She suddenly shouted: "In any case, if this is so, I am ashamed for you!" Meaume then in a much lower voice asked Marie Aidelle: "Why did you come to Picardie? Why follow me to Quend after I went there?"

"I liked the name of that village. I wondered what could possibly happen to me in a place called Quend. I wasn't guided by desire but by curiosity. I wandered." On that, she left him. She took a boat. The vessel landed in the fiefdom of Nice. A carriage took her to Lyon.

CHAPTER XXV

About anger, Marie said: "All unfortunate people are born from an anger of their progenitors which the pleasure that followed was not enough to appease."

In anger, our ears cease to hear.

Aristotle of Stagira : "It is no more possible for a man in the throes of anger to stop himself than it is for a diver, plunging from a cliff, to stop his flight and not enter the water."

The Abbé de Saint-Cyran: "Anger means the denial of color. Meaumus the Roman was the painter of the refusal of color. Black and anger are the selfsame word just as God and vengeance constitute the unique eternal act. The Eternal said: 'Vengeance is mine.' Long ago, *kholè* did not mean *ira* but blackness. In the eyes of the Ancients, the anger within melancholy is the black

within the night. There is never enough black to express the violent contrast that rends this world between birth and death. But it is useless to put on a blindfold, spin around twice with the blindfold knotted behind one's head. One must not say: *between birth and death*. One must say in a decisive manner like God: *between sexuality and hell*."

Meaume said: "There you are, that is what human sentiments are. The rain that falls annihilates colors."

Anger is as exalting and vertiginous as pleasure.

Fish hawks and seagulls say the ocean that batters the dyke, that finally breaks through and finally spreads in the streets, is happy.

CHAPTER XXVI

In the cities of mankind, they call the office of public records the place where notarized deeds are kept in archives to remain for centuries.

In 1656, Marie Aidelle left Meaume's atelier on the Aventine Hill in Rome. On the twenty-fifth of November in 1658, Meaume is present in Paris at the wedding of Marguerite Weyen, daughter of the drypoint engraver and print seller on Rue St. Jacques, at the sign with the image of Saint Benedict. The signature *Geoffroy Meaume* is very legible beneath the elaborately intertwined capitals H and W of the print seller. That day, the twenty-fifth of November 1658, the daughter Weyen is marrying François de Poilly the Elder, also called Poilly d'Abbeville.

CHAPTER XXVII

There is a picture that Meaume executed in mezzotint, showing old Abraham taking Oesterer in the stable. Meaume declared that he had indeed surprised them while the young man was bent before the older one. In Meaume's picture, Abraham has the body of an old man with ribs protruding, stomach sagging, shanks without flesh.

Another indecent print, executed in the same manner (that is to say, dating from after 1656) is peculiar. It depicts the Temptations of Saint Anthony. The hermit saint is seated in front of the cave, his sex erect in his hand. He is weeping. There is a rock garden between the saint and a woman who spreads her legs wide. Her head is bent forward over the darkness of her sex, which she seems to contemplate but which is not quite visible.

Next to her, a small devil is shitting into an open book. On the left of the engraving, a Castilian is playing the violin for a sow.

In an oval inset. The right hand emerging from a lace sleeve extends its fingers; the index finger is bent inward, toward a man's furiously erect sex directly in front of the mirror reflecting the candle that lights the scene. The mirror and the candle are on the inlaid top of a small table.

Finally, not a mezzotint but a drypoint engraving, one among those luminous ones that Meaume made. At the center of the engraving Marie Aidelle draws an overflowing bucket from a well. A man seen from the rear, sitting on the wall of the well, takes a pebble from his shoe. (Without a doubt, Meaume himself, since he is presented from behind.) In front of him, an oar in his hand, Oesterer lowers his pants. An emaciated woman (Esther) wipes his penis with a towel. On the right, a donkey.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Meaume the Engraver died at the end of 1667 in Utrecht. Gerard Van Honthorst was then a painter with a bad reputation. Honthorst lived from 1590 to 1656. There is no connection between the work of Honthorst and Meaume except darkness. It so happens that in 1667 Meaume died in Utrecht at the house of Gerard Van Honthorst. A copper plate, signed on the left and dated December 1666, would be proof if this were needed. The engraver had to leave Rome either at the end of 1664 or in the fall of 1666. This point is uncertain. At that time, Holland was a rich nation that appreciated the work of French artists. But the reason for Meaume the Engraver's departure from Rome does not seem to have been the wealth of Holland's cities. In Rome, they called Gerard Van Honthorst *Gherardo delle Notti*, which means Gerard of

the Nights. The ample atelier in Utrecht then belonged to Wilhelm Van Honthorst's wife, whose first name was Catherine. It is Marie Aidelle who cradles the body of Meaume who killed himself in Honthorst's house. Also, it is not known why Marie Aidelle has returned to the engraver in Holland, at the house of the sister-in-law of Gerard of the Nights, in the very moments when he would die.

CHAPTER XXIX

At the end of the month of February 1664 in Rome, a series of thirty-two obscene prints, all acquired from a shop on the Via Giulia, were delivered to the eldest son of one of the greatest families in Rome. His first name was Eugenio, a very handsome young man, very cultivated, very refined, very sensitive, very chaste. They had all been executed by Meaume the Engraver at the request of the family physician, Marcello Zerra. The young patrician, whom he had examined with care, was twenty years old, vigorous, endowed with well-formed genitals, but he declared he was unable to marry since he had never, in all his life, experienced desire. The parents did not place any faith in what their eldest son said and had Zerra examine him. Marcello Zerra prescribed obscene images that Eugenio would examine for a whole night while in

the company of two Florentine prostitutes: one older and sweet, even complaisant; the other much younger and vivacious. This experiment not only failed but provoked Eugenio to such disgust that he became nauseated, and his nausea was so violent that he was overcome with anguish. The women of the night from the city of Florence were unable to agree on the results of their nocturnal exertions. The younger one affirmed that the young man had remained flaccid in body and extremely wretched in soul, concluding, since she had been asked to give an opinion, that he was not made for civilian life, that is to say he was neither virile nor capable of paternity. The older whore, fearing that they would not receive the agreed upon compensation for the two round trips and the whole night's work, contended that this assessment was inexact; the young man had had a momentary erection, and one more night would easily end the inhibitions and other difficulties that she had been able to observe at her leisure and in detail. The young Eugenio fainted when he heard the harlot propose one more night of pleasure. They had to send for a two-wheeled carriage. In the family palace, interrogated that very day by the ubiquitous Zerra, the laundresses attested that they had never seen the least trace of nocturnal pollution on the eldest son's sheets. Zerra asked the parents to reflect before confronting their child. But the head of the family took no notice. Many important and ancient family interests required that their eldest son be united

with the young girl who had been promised to him since childhood.

Eugenio never succeeded in performing the sexual act with his wife.

The young woman, still a virgin, complained to her family, who echoed her distress. And more, the in-laws threatened to invalidate the marriage if their daughter was not promptly deflowered and did not experience a little natural pleasure.

Once again he was consulted, and once again Doctor Zerra prescribed Meaume's fascinating pictures and suggested to the young wife that she help her husband sustain the firmness of his desire, using all the fingers of her hands. The young man killed himself on 22 May 1664. The engravings were withdrawn from sale. The copper plates and all the impressions found with the print seller at the sign of the Black Cross, whether by Meaume's hand or by other artists, were carted fifty meters from there to the Field of Flowers where they were publicly burned and melted. This is one of the reasons so few erotic engravings remain that were printed by the hand of Claude Mellan or Meaume the Engraver.

CHAPTER XXX

During the annual meeting of the departmental Société des Beaux-Arts in 1882, Monsieur Gaston Le Breton presented a paper titled *A Beautiful Mezzotint of an Obscene Subject Attributed to Meaumus*. The description by Gaston Le Breton is as follows: "The portrait is signed and dated Meaum. Sculps. Rom. August. 1666 in the lower left corner beside a Maltese cross.

"A man, his head in shadow, wears a black taffeta vest, unbuttoned to let us see a very handsome anatomy. He is sitting, turned from left to right, but faces us. His legs are spread. His erection stands out from the background of a curtain of Flemish tapestry. His right hand points, through an opening in this floral tapestry slightly raised behind him, at some beautiful seashells put on a folding stool. To his left, on a card, placed on a table beneath his

left hand, one reads the following inscription, written in full: 'Collection of Nocturnal Prints.' This is the famous and accursed book of 1650. The man is of a certain age. The general air is sad. His head, deep in the shadows of the curtain and of an overhanging stone lintel, is somehow hideous. All the light, whose source we do not see, is concentrated on his belly and his private parts in violent distension." This mezzotint engraving has not been seen since 1882. It was made without doubt later than the bonfire of books and perverse prints on the Campo dei Fiori in May 1664. It has never been reproduced.

CHAPTER XXXI

The two most celebrated engravings by Meaume the Engraver that have been preserved and appear in numerous copies in a very large number of editions are *Saint John on the Isle of Patmos* and *Hero and Leander*.

Saint John is seen on top of a mountain on the isle of Patmos. He is seated in the shade of a tree, his back against a rock. He is writing the Apocalypse. On the left of this long narrow etching, an eagle, its claws gripping the rim of the mountain crest, receives the light of a dying sun between his immense open wings.

Hero and Leander is a mezzotint. At the summit of a gothic tower, battered by waves which the tempest still hurls up, Hero, almost naked and her hair wild, leaning forward, her breast falling into the light, holding in her right hand a Roman oil lamp with a burning wick, looks

into the sea to find the body of her dead lover, naked on his back, his head twisted violently behind him, rolled in the waves like a branch broken from a tree.

CHAPTER XXXII

He believed in the judgment of God, but beyond that had no faith in the immortality of the soul. However, according to Poilly, as long as he lived in Rome, he used to enter that so very remarkable little church of La Bocca della Verità.

He would take his hat off and sit.

Sometimes he would kneel.

Every day, even in the Mediterranean rain, even when warm mists rose up above the river and clung to the walls and to the trees, he would go a few yards from there up to the Fabricius Bridge. He would go down to the bank near the ruins and the tide. His back against the bark of a tree or sheltered by its foliage, or beneath an ancient overhanging stone, amid ducks and geese paddling in the mud, under the eyes of gray baby goats, he

would look at the Tiber, its eddies, its surges, its sprays of white foam rebounding off the rocks. He would sink in its muffled roar.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A man's ear in a transparent glass flask is listed in Meaume's inventory in Rome.

It is also listed as one of the *Eight Ecstasies of Meaume the Engraver*, according to Poilly.

This ear seems to have been left in a chest on the third floor of Meaume's atelier from 1655 to 1702.

A young man, originally from Magdeburg, happened to love men and had the nickname Oesterer. He had been trained in the 1640s by Abraham Van Berchem in Antwerp. He found himself waiting at Quend in the company of Marie Aidelle, while Abraham and Meaume the Engraver, fleeing the savagery of the French soldiers, were trying to rejoin them by sea. In the spring of 1651, at the time of the jousts on the river Authie between men

piloting rafts of timber, Oesterer entered the contest on behalf of the guild of the earthenware potters. And he became the champion, to the disappointment of all. So the pilots got together and, against the advice of some of the burgers of Quend, against the advice of the mariners, against the advice of the shell-fishermen, against the advice of the sea-fishermen, against the advice of the potters of earthenware and Delftware, they decided to cancel the tournament. They organized a second joust, where Oesterer had to accept a one-hand handicap, and of course he lost. One calls it a one-hand handicap when one hand is tied against the contestant's back. It is not possible to joust on the water with a bound hand; the body's equilibrium becomes too precarious. It seemed that for each river, there could be only one champion among the timber pilots for each year. But this injustice by the raft pilots and by the harbormaster of Quend so enraged Oesterer that neither Marie Aidelle, nor the innkeeper, nor anyone in the earthenware potters' guild who had made him their champion could manage to pacify him.

Along the water, the raft pilot moves forward, his harpoon in one hand to steer the floating timber close to the bank of the Authie. This is the image we see on the silver plate signed April. 1665, Meaum. Sculpt.

The man turned suddenly to Oesterer and threw his harpoon at him.

First, Oesterer dodged the hook.

When Oesterer heard the rhythm of the raft pilot's breath coming faster and faster, he took that moment to kill his attacker.

Oesterer always fought by ear.

When the innkeeper of Quend discovered the body in the outgoing tide, bumping against the landing, he threatened Oesterer, saying he would summon the English soldiers.

Oesterer slapped the innkeeper for a good quarter-hour.

He showed him the pile of ironed laundry on the table.

"Washed where? At the public laundry?"

"Yes," replied the innkeeper, who had turned red as fire.

Oesterer did not want to wear clothes washed at the town laundry. They did all the funeral laundry there. The young Oesterer called the place where people went to get the water to wash the dead a "funeral laundry." According to Oesterer, this water brought bad luck. He went to a secondhand clothes dealer in a neighboring village where he exchanged clothes washed in Quend for others, though they displeased him. He accepted the necessity of stealing a light blue suit from a burger's house. Now a man who had seen the little Austrian kill the raft pilot was following him everywhere. This man spied on him continuously, and everyone saw him spying. There was

not a market stand, not a window, not a wine shop, not a shack in the sand dunes where he was not seen asking questions. Marie Aidelle showed Oesterer this man who was speaking against him.

Marie Aidelle whispered to Oesterer that she had an idea. He asked her to tell. She told him. He laughed.

One day when the man was crouching, listening, his ear fixed to the door of the guild of earthenware potters, Oesterer, who was their champion, immobilized him and tied his hands together. Then with a hammer and nail, Marie nailed his ear to the door.

The man remained there, crouched and nailed. The whole village came to see him. Even the potters of Delftware came, saw, and laughed. They pulled off his breeches, and tore off his shirt. He did not know how to remove the nail without tearing his ear. He screamed for someone to come and pull out the nail, but no one would risk it. The man who had been victim of such harsh treatment asked a woman who was passing by if she would put a handkerchief over his face so that no one would see the shame he felt in his position and his having so obviously relieved himself. His words touched the woman, but she let him go on talking for she feared the wrath of the earthenware potters' champion. She herself was a potter of Delftware. Finally one night, the man tore off his ear, and one saw him no more. Though everyone, up until then, had despised the little Austrian because of his morals, from that day on, he was respected.

But the woodcutters hated him. Marie Aidelle kept the ear covered with salt in a stoneware jar, then in a glass flask which happened to have been kept in Meaume's atelier, as listed in the Roman inventory, without anyone knowing why. There is no engraving of an ear from the hand of the engraver.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Meaume the Engraver, at the age of forty-nine, was attacked in the Roman countryside on the eighth day of June 1666. A deposition by the Roman archers and dated on that day, signed with eleven names, bears witness to it. The engraver then lived alone. He is sitting in the countryside, amidst stone ruins, his back against the trunk of a small green oak, his large straw hat concealing his face and protecting him from the sun. He dreams.

A young man wakes him, grabs him, throws him on the dry ground, plunges a knife into his neck to cut his throat.

The engraver is conscious of a sharp smell.

He raises his eyes to the face of the young man stabbing his throat. He looks at him: he is shocked by his features. He gazes at him. He does not cry out. Strangely, he

thinks of a woodcut by Jan Heemkers who was his master in Bruges. In this woodcut, Hildebrand is in front of Hadubrand who raises his weapon. The father sees his son who is about to kill him. He sees that his son does not recognize him. He sees in his son's eyes the start of the fatal stroke. But the father says nothing. The young man, twenty-six years old, plunges the blade in his neck. The blood spatters. This is the way spring is supposed to be born from winter.

At that instant, a shadow carrying a sack bursts from a grove of elder trees above them and starts running towards the foot of the hill, running between ruins, nettles, brambles, shafts of broken columns, little stunted oaks.

The young man abruptly leaves Meaume in the dust of the hillside, with his throat half-cut; he leaps up and takes off at full speed, in pursuit of the shadow racing away below.

CHAPTER XXXV

Meaume is stretched out on a straw bed. He is in a shepherd's thatched hut, still in the Roman countryside. A physician is wrapping a white cloth around his neck to bandage the wound. The engraver's mind drifts to what just happened. He says, whispering: "I think that all my life I've been jealous. Jealousy comes before imagination. Jealousy, it is sight stronger than eyesight."

In front of him, the young man, twenty-six years old, who attacked him. He is surrounded by four Roman archers. He is standing; he is pale; he is extremely handsome; his hands are tied behind his back; he cannot say three successive words in Italian or a phrase that means anything.

At his side there is a faience seller who eyes him hungrily, even ardently, and looks for a way to help him.

Finally, the young man says in Flemish to the archer beside him that he speaks only Flemish and that he does not know the language of the Romans.

He says in Flemish that he made a mistake. He murmurs in broken Latin: "Perdonare mihi! Perdonare mihi!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

Then Meaume suddenly began to cry and turned to the wall. He asked softly in Flemish from the shadow: "Where do you come from?"

"Bruges"

"What is your name?"

"Vanlacre."

Meaume kept silent.

Vanlacre continued: "I arrived in Rome today. Someone just stole all my bags. I'm here because I'm looking for my father. It so happens that my true father lives in Rome. I know that he sells his engravings on the Via Giulia. The print seller refused to give me his address. Do you know this engraver?"

"No. I do not know him," answered Meaume in Flemish without turning toward him.

Thus the engraver remained hidden in shadow.

Then, although his hands were bound behind his back, the handsome young man fell to his knees on the earthen floor in front of the straw bed. Becoming more insistent, in Flemish he asked the man he had just wounded:

"This engraver, his name is Meaumus. Do you know him?"

"No. I do not know him," Meaume replied.

"In the bag that was stolen from me, there was an engraving that Meaumus had made of my mother's face. A likeness I so resemble that anyone who saw it would think it was me," the young man went on in Flemish. "That portrait would have prevented any dispute that might have been raised to contradict me. It would have overcome all doubts. I don't have it any more."

"Perhaps your thief or your bag will be found," said Meaume.

"I hope so!" the young man cried out.

At that moment, the Consul of Flanders and the Netherlands entered the shepherd's thatched hut.

"Once again, forgive me, Sir," repeated the handsome young man in Flemish, still kneeling, pressing himself against the straw bed where Meaume was lying, "Forgive me that just now I believed you were the man who stole my traveling bag."

All this time, the consul, the physician, and the archers were arguing.

Then Meaume turned to the group of archers and said in Italian: "Let this young man go!"

But the four archers did not think this would be right. Meaume raised himself as best he could and managed to sit up on the shepherd's bed. His face was covered with sweat. The cloth around his neck was red with blood. He was weeping. His nose was running. He was gasping. His ugliness was even more repellent than usual. He moved to take his purse from his breeches. He gave a gold coin to the physician who had cared for him. He gave four coins to the archers. One of the archers pulled Vanlacre up by his tunic and untied his hands. The archers insisted that the physician write a report that they would take to their garrison. They asked the faience seller, next the consul to sign their names. Next the priest. The young Vanlacre signed in his turn. The young man then turned for the last time to Meaume, stretched out on the straw bed; the young man still did not recognize him; he again fell to his knees; he kissed the engraver's hand; he continued jabbering his unintelligible: "Perdonare mihi! Perdonare mihi!"; he got up suddenly; he did not even greet the consul of Flanders, nor the archers, nor the priest, nor the faience seller. He is out the door. The chickens screech. He runs down the hill.

CHAPTER XXXVII

They sent for a coach to take him from the Aventine to the Porta Portuensis. They took the engraver to his townhouse. He ordered his two maids to close his door to everyone except his friend Claude. They no longer opened the door when someone knocked, or responded if someone scratched at the door to the yard that opened onto the mossy lane. Only Claude Gellée would come to join him in the evening. The two maids would open to the signal they had agreed on. They helped the old painter afflicted with gout climb the stone steps of the old, narrow dwelling until they came onto the terrace. They brought up wine and soup for the two men, then left them in the shadow of the overhang where they talked in the cool of the evening. Meaume the Engraver had lost weight little by little. After the wound to his throat, a

swelling began behind his vocal cords, which weakened the sound of his voice. He was now only able to swallow liquid food.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Remarks by Meaume the Engraver and Gellée the Painter.

"If he hadn't said his name, I would never have understood the nature of the joy that seized me when the young man in the countryside stabbed my throat."

At the beginning Claude Le Lorrain did not understand anything that the engraver was saying, but he let him murmur on, judging that it did him good to confide in a man whose kin lived in Lorraine just as Maume's own family still did.

"I smelled a marvelous odor both on his hands and on his breath while he was screaming over me. I am not talking about the smell of brambles in the undergrowth."

Meaume continued on: "Rome is no longer watertight as it was before the past became a flood and poured over the walls."

One day, however, Claude began to reply: "You talk in riddles. And that is irritating for whoever listens to you."

Meaume responded: "One reaches an age when one no longer meets life but time. One ceases to see life as living. One sees time in the act of devouring life raw. One's heart seizes up. One clings to driftwood just to see a little more of the spectacle bleeding from one end of the world to the other, and yet not fall in."

Claude the painter told him that what he was saying was not very clear, even though the sentences he enunciated were correctly constructed.

Meaume said: "There is an irresistible night in the depths of man. Every evening women and men fall asleep. They sink into that darkness as if it were a memory.

"It is a memory.

"Men sometimes believe that they come close to women; they look into the expressions on their faces; they reach out to their shoulders; they return to their bodies every evening; and they lie down by their sides. Yet they do not fall asleep; they are only toys of night, pulled on a leash by the invisible scene that engendered them and which casts its shadow everywhere and on everything."

"I don't understand anything you're saying," replied Claude Gellée.

Meaume complained that he couldn't get himself to draw any more. He had terrible difficulty composing a frontispiece that showed a woman in tears, looking at a

distant plain and a small horse. He had promised it to Anne-Thérèse de Marguenat for her *Collected Thoughts on Manners, Sensuality, Murders, and Pleasing Sentiments*. On another evening, he said to Le Lorrain: "The essential part of my life is completed. I have seen two or three things for the first time."

CHAPTER XXXIX

As it grew, the swelling that was lodged in the engraver's throat, then in his esophagus, began to press down on his lungs, causing secretions and inflammation. He had pneumonia three times in succession which tired him deeply, and which was complicated by bronchitis with dry, weak coughing. He then made his will, for he believed that fever would take him away.

In Grühn's book, Grühn says that at the end of his life, Meaume declared: "When I sit in front of my copper plate, sadness overcomes me. I no longer find those times in which I dream of an image, or rather hold it before my eyes to reproduce it. My work is elsewhere."

CHAPTER XL

Though Claude Gellée insisted his throat should be operated on, Meaume the Engraver didn't want that. One day he refused to open his door to Claude Gellée, who had come with a surgeon; the servants had received orders to let no one but Le Lorrain and only Le Lorrain into his home. Meaume had told his maids that he feared more than any other man an unknown visitor, strikingly handsome, who would possess an engraving that he had made. The engraver was, in truth, more depressed than sick. He decided to leave Rome, which had burned the most vibrant and accomplished images among all those he had composed. Gellée the Painter let him talk. He was well aware that in all his reasoning, the engraver was just rehashing an old story and using fine words that seemed to make sense but were actually empty. So while Gellée

kept insisting that Meaume tell the truth, the engraver kept repeating: "I don't know why there are no more living images in my soul. That is the truth. That is the reason I cry."

But little did it matter what Meaume said to him; Claude doubted that his friend was telling the truth.

It so happened that Meaume's little two-story house was set back in a lane that opened onto the Church of La Bocca della Verità above the Tiber.

One day, Le Lorrain said to Meaume: "My dear friend, I would like to walk with you on the riverbank to the church; once there, you will put your arm into the stone lion's mouth. I would like to find out if God would not tear off your hand on the spot in a single bite!"

Claude laughed but Meaume did not. Remaining serious, he maintained that one always lied no matter what one said; and that one lied all the more, the more diligent one was or the more force one exerted in upholding the truth. "My friend, here is the truth: no one who lies lies completely."

CHAPTER XLI

In June 1667, the English fleet was entirely destroyed in the Thames. The treaty of Cologne is signed on the fifteenth of December. On the sixteenth of December, Meaume the Engraver dictates a second will in Utrecht, whispering yet more feebly. His throat has definitely become more constricted. The notary and Catherine Van Honthorst are bent over the bed, their ears almost touching his mouth. He has not eaten since the summer. On the eighteenth, he adds a codicil where he puts the name of Marie Aidelle. Doubtless, that is why Catherine Van Honthorst sent for Marie to come. He does not recognize her. Suddenly he draws on the surface of the purée they give him—and which he has refused to eat—a little trellis with spring flowers.

Right afterward, he asks once more for blue paper and chalk.

He draws again. He draws: at the bottom of a cliff, on the path, a peasant returns from the fields, a spade on his shoulder. By a table standing beneath an elm, Oesterer and Meaume play *Morra*. Chickens are pecking about. A little girl bends her knees and urinates.

It is in Utrecht that he draws on blue paper, paradoxical as it may seem, the image of a black galley on the Arno River between the Santa Trinità and Alla Carraia bridges. Four oarsmen are engaged in naval jousts. A corpse floats in the water near a young woman in a small rowboat who is weeping.

He suddenly begins speaking with a dead woman. He speaks Nanni's name. He says: "Oh! The secret of my dreams was a body that returned to me unceasingly. A woman who at one time was horrified when she saw my face. I lost then, irretrievably, the greatest part of the substance of my life. I have kept with me the look that was in her eyes when she used to turn toward me, but she refused to let me share her life. I have had to travel in worlds other than hers, but in each dream, in each image, in each wave, in every landscape, I have seen something of her or something that originated with her. With a different face, I had attracted and seduced her." It was at that time that his memory was overtaken by lethargy. Catherine, the former sister-in-law of the late Gerard

of the Nights, came to Marie Aidelle and told her that the dying man spoke of a certain Nanni. Marie turned pale. She was then overcome with rage. She spoke in a low voice, but violently: "Since I was born, I have not seen men who would give themselves completely to the woman they love. And I have never seen any men who would not seek in their companions something submissive, agreeable, scented, nourishing, approving, an enveloping, lukewarm softness, a part of reproduction, a memory of mother. The absent ones are always there. The great absent ones loom, day in day out, ever higher, and the shadow they cast is ever more opaque. That which has been lost is always in the right. As for me, I say: love is a disgusting fraud." Then she went into the room where Meaume the Engraver, fifty years old, was in agony, and she took his head in her arms and cradled him until he died. That is how he took his last breath. She did not weep after he had died, but everyone who came and went through Catherine's house saw how distraught Marie Aidelle was, and it was not caused by fasting for the Nativity. One would have thought she had been abandoned.

CHAPTER XLII

Two last dreams of Meaume.

He was approaching the window. The windowpanes were separated by strips of lead covered with gray moss. In the distance, there was the bay. It was raining.

Only four boats were moored there, at the wooden pier on the edge of the estuary. One had a completely blue hull. A blue made intense by the somber water.

Such is the first dream. It is in color.

The last dream, black. The dreamer looked at the façade, deep in shadow, of the Palais du Louvre, the Tower of Nesles, the bridge, the black water. Everything sleeps.

He eats a waffle.

CHAPTER XLIII

While Meaume the Engraver was still in this world, during the very last days he lived, dying of hunger, his memory lost, he did not recognize faces any more. He made strange gestures under the sheet and he was speaking to the flies. Meaume the Engraver, at the end of his life, knew several forms of weariness and suffered from the chaos of his thoughts. He endured attacks of sorrow that were followed by long silences. He had uncontrollable surges of hatred for those around him. He said the flies were talking to him, and that was surprising to him. When a dinner was brought to him—which he refused to eat—a fly landed on the edge of the bowl. Suddenly, the fly, which was sucking up some meat juice, raised its head and said:

“Are you now man or ghost?”

"I don't know," Meaume answered her. "And you?"

"I don't know myself. But I tend to think that I am living," said the fly, continuing to lap up the meat juice.

Meaume, with a gesture of his hand, refused the fork someone held out to him and said then to the fly:

"Me, I think that I am very close to having been alive. The ancestors visit me. I have kept in me the woman I have lost. She too visits me. She has even become a young man who attacks me in the shadow of a tree on the Aventine hill. The stare of others haunts me and chokes me; I feel such shame. I am not truly myself. That is perhaps what it is to be a ghost."

"In that case, I prefer to be a fly," the fly replied.

The twenty-fourth of December, during the third Vigil of the Nativity, while everyone is fasting, he dies without having been able to swallow anything since August.

CHAPTER XLIV

The etchings drawn by Meaume at the end of his life were neither engraved nor printed by his own hand. Without doubt that is why the darkness in them is softer. Here is the first nocturnal scene: near a willow on the right, Marie Aidelle sits on her heels and holds a candle; in the middle, the innkeeper stands and holds a lantern; beside him, his back against a boat pulled up onto the bank, a potter holds a lamp which he has set on the edge of the hull. All three cast light on a young man, completely naked (Oesterer), who searches in the river.

The river is the Authie.

The drawings on the copper plates are by Meaume. The etchings were printed after his death. The printing is dark but velvety. These are not images in mezzotint.

A lamp, an earthenware cooking pot full of oil, a wick, a copper plate, two engraving tools, the silence, a bony hand, the night.

At noon, the light falls straight onto the river. Soldiers pass over the bridge one by one.

CHAPTER XLV

The Inventories of the Sieur Meaumus, Roman Citizen and Carver of Etchings includes two pages in folio which, curiously, are dated in the following century (1702).

It was discovered after his death that the engraver was rich: a hundred or so beautiful jewels and as many renowned paintings and drawings, which brought two hundred and twenty thousand gold francs. A house in Rome valued at sixteen thousand francs and a farm above the Gulf of Salerno with vineyards and fields, estimated at four thousand francs. No current debts. Two beds, two easels, two chests, four tables, four benches, and as many stools. A four-wheeled carriage upholstered in black serge. An overcoat, two capes, four shirts, as well as three breeches.

The two horses were sold.

A cat was given to one of the maids.

"Meaume the Engraver, Citizen of the City of Rome, learned how to draw in the atelier of Follin. He learned the rudiments of the craft of shading and card printing from Rhuys the Protestant in Toulouse. He learned copper plate engraving and the technique of acid etching in the atelier of Johann Heemkers in Bruges. He learned to engrave landscapes from nature at the atelier of Claude Gellée after he arrived in Rome. He was born for an art that requires self-control and demands a great deal of patience. He had his face burned by acid. He never painted. Daret made shadows by cross-hatching; Mellan by engraving parallel furrows; Meaume by juxtaposing strange little letters. He was asking ten thousand gold francs for a copper plate. A print was worth half a gold franc and a drawing half of that. He refused to execute ornate initials, text illustrations, coats of arms, titles, floral embellishments, scrolls, end-page decorations. The only portrait of Meaume is by Poilly d'Abbeville. He is sitting in the Roman countryside as the rays of the setting sun fall on grazing cattle nearby. He is shown in the guise of Saint Joseph absorbed in reading, resting his left arm on an old wall, covering his ear with his hand. In the lower right corner: *F. Poilly scul. Pascet Dominus quasi Agnum in latitudine*. The closest of his friends was Claude Gellée. Although he was born earlier, Claude Gellée survived Meaume by fifteen years; like him, he was from a family in Lorraine. Michel Lasne, however,

was from Normandy; Weyen from Flanders; Abraham Van Berchem, from Holland; Ruprecht from the Rhine Palatinate; Honthorst from Utrecht. He contracted for two seasons to teach Abraham Bosse, from Tours. Abraham Bosse spent those two seasons in Rome without anyone knowing he was a Protestant. He received his training under the name Aquila. Abraham Bosse had chosen this name because of God's warning to Job in the Bible: *Et ubicumque cadaver fuerit, statim adest aquila*. 'Wherever there is a corpse, the eagle is there' (Job xxxix, 30). In Paris, Meaume the Engraver bought varnish from Pardoux, the lute-maker on the Ile de la Cité, because this was the hardest varnish he could find and purchase. He discovered that lute makers' black varnish permitted drypoint tracing so sharp, that the most skillful practitioner of that art would think he had used a stylus. Meaume the Engraver taught this technique to Monsieur Bosse who wrote it down in his book. Catharina Van Honthorst had carved in Latin lettering on his tombstone: 'He died ripe for Heaven but not for death. His name will live eternally. *Stabit in aeternum nomen.*'"

CHAPTER XLVI

Meaume the Engraver had become so skillful at handling the burin that sometimes, when he had finished drawing on a copper plate ready for the acid, he took his point and engraved freehand little silhouettes, or vegetables, or insects, or pebbles and rocks in spaces where a void unbalanced the composition.

Very rare are those makers of etchings who can see the balance of the images as they compose them.

He worked standing up, bending forward, half lying on the table. For hours, he dabbed the warm varnish on the copper plate with a pad; he never used a brush.

He blackened the copper plate with a torch.

After he had etched the plate, he tilted a wooden easel, placed a trough for the excess acid at its foot, put the copper plate on the easel and poured the acid.

He would then stroke the acid with a pigeon feather to intensify its effect.

Hidden within his own artistic output, like many craftsmen of the time, like makers of etchings, like engravers, he would recreate earlier works or take inspiration from them, reselling older inspiration to the collectors who relied on him.

Grünehagen quotes these remarks from Meaume in 1652: "We should consider engravers as translators who transfer the beauties of one rich and magnificent language into another which is indeed lesser but which has more violence. This violence imposes immediate silence on whomever it confronts."

This assertion by Meaume le Lorrain seems a response to that of Mellan d'Abbeville, who said that he himself had always engraved pictures with more fire and more freedom than any painters, slaves as they were to their multitudes of colors and the temptation to seduce. Mellan even said: "Such a profusion of face-paint and tints have dragged mortals to their ruin since the first fruit."

Five copper plates dedicated to Marie Aidelle and signed as such. An old woman seen from the back, seated on a stool, warms her hands over the embers in a hand-warmer. Next to her, a cat. Two keys hang from her belt. She holds in her right hand, stretched over the left, a snail that extends its head and pushes up its little horns. This engraving is strange.

The sun is at its zenith. From the terrace, one sees the roofs of Rome below. The overhang shelters a long table with six legs where there are two varnished copper plates. Beneath the tabletop, troughs for the acid. In the inner room, a second source of light comes from a stained glass window with diamond-shaped panes. To the right of the stone window-frame, a curtain falling from the canopy of a four-poster bed hides the bed within and also the chest that contains the tapestry with Homeric scenes. In front of the window, a large bare table with four legs. Two armchairs for guests have been placed against the walls. A fireplace with a cast iron screen. The rest of the room is bare.

Immodest woman. Jupiter, filled with desire, leans over the body of sleeping Antiope, daughter of Nycteus, King of Thebes. She has stretched her arms above her head, her mouth is open, her thighs are open, her body seems at ease but not her face, which is frozen in horror. She sees something resembling Nycteus's desire and jealousy. Just above Antiope's genitals the Olympian God moves his head forward. He looks at the sex of the enchanting young woman. The god's right hand holds back the bed-curtain. The rest is black. Etching and drypoint.

Immodest woman. Mezzotint. Figures seen face forward in an oval. One is kneeling, the other sitting. The latter holds his hat on his right arm. His head bent forward leaves visible only his mass of hair. His belly is bare, and what juts out is partly hidden in the mouth of the

delicate young woman with a long neck who is on her knees. On the right, a drawn curtain reveals the shelves of a library.

The Louvre and the Pont-Neuf in the countryside, the shade of trees alongside a river, with small animals, beneath the sun. Admirably engraved.

CHAPTER XLVII

Marie Aidelle reported to Catherine Van Honthorst on Meaume's childhood. Meaume's grandmother baptized the child to give him strength, dipping her finger in the blood of Concini when he had been ripped apart. Meaume loved red wine, which he drank to excess. He let himself die. Meaume was born in Paris in the spring of 1617. He was from Lorraine. He often said: "Children's expressions are not settled." Accordingly, he never drew them. After the age of fifty, his face was tense and strange. He was very thin. His eyes still glittered like those of nursing babies and frogs. Very large gray orbs, but one never knew what went on behind them. They lived out their life in shadowy waters. A most intense life. But it was impossible to say if pain, or hunger or anguish or if lacerating rage lived behind those eyes. The wound on his face made his expressions even more unsettling.

Douglas Penick has been a research associate at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and was a longtime student of Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche. He wrote the National Film Board of Canada's prize-winning two-part series on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Leonard Cohen, narrator) and the libretti for two operas: *King Gesar* (Sony CD) and *Ashoka's Dream* (Santa Fe Opera) with composer Peter Lieberman. His novels include *A Journey of the North Star* (2012) and *Dreamers and Their Shadows* (2013). His collection of short stories, *From the Empire of Fragments*, appeared in 2015.

Charles Ré has performed as an actor in the United States in television, films, the Public Shakespeare Theater in New York, and in speaking parts at the Metropolitan Opera. He has translated hundreds of documentaries, as well as narrating more than 2,500 documentaries, educational films, and videos for the francophone market.

Front cover:

Wenceslaus Hollar

Young Woman with Side Curls, Back View, 1645.

Printed in the United States of America.

A Terrace in Rome describes the tormented life of Geoffroy Meaume, a seventeenth-century engraver of encrypted shadows and erotic prints. After a passionate affair in his youth concludes with his face being burned by acid thrown at him by his lover's jealous fiancé, Meaume undertakes a lifetime of wandering, his mind forever engraved by the memory of the woman who spurned him. With a face of boiled leather and a mind haunted by a nightmare of desire, he devotes himself to the black-and-white world of etchings and mezzotints, forsaking the paradise of color to engage in a science of shadows. This fragmented narrative of a man attacked by images is related in forty-seven short chapters which themselves act as engravings; a tale told by an antiquarian, full of fragmented vision and sexual hell. First published in French in 2000, *A Terrace in Rome* received the Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française that same year, and went on to be translated into nineteen languages. This is its first appearance in English.



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